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BRIAN HENDERSON

## Critique of Cine-Structuralism (PART 1)

Several recent texts put the question of structuralist study of cinema back on the agenda: Charles W. Eckert's *Film Comment* article, "The English Cine-Structuralists"; the new edition of Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, which reconsiders aspects of the 1969 original; and the *Screen* translation of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* collective text on *Young Mr. Lincoln*.<sup>1</sup> The latter is explicitly a critique of structuralism and itself a post-structuralist work. It appears in English with an afterword by Peter Wollen, which provides the occasion for a specific confrontation. These critical texts are more readily comparable in that they all deal, directly or indirectly, with a common object, the films of John Ford. According to *Tel Quel*, "the exact value of a text lies in its integration and destruction of other texts."<sup>2</sup> The texts we are concerned with have value by this test. Wollen's book destroyed and/or integrated in whole or part many previous film-critical texts. Eckert partially destroys the auteur-structuralist texts, even as he seeks to valorize them. The *Young Mr. Lincoln* text lays waste four entire areas of film study. The present text seeks to integrate and destroy these texts in turn; more precisely, it inaugurates this task. This is its only praise, for most film-critical texts are not worth destroying and are certainly not to be integrated.

Eckert's article concerns those English critics who refurbished the *politique des auteurs* with the critical apparatus of structuralism in the late sixties: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Peter Wollen, Jim Kitses, Alan Lovell, and Ben Brewster. He distinguishes three forms of structural criticism of special interest to film critics: (1) the study of linguistic structures in narrative (Todorov and Barthes); (2) the semiological study of the language of cinema (Metz, Pasolini, Eco), which attempts to determine how cinema signifies and whether it can be analyzed like a lan-

guage; and (3) Levi-Strauss's study of the underlying structures of thought and of the codes employed in the dialectical systems which operate in mythic thought. The last form of structural study most closely approximates that used by the auteur-structuralists and is the one Eckert concentrates on. (He finds the other two studies "unpromising" and "limited in scope and in the applicability of the insights they achieve."<sup>3</sup>) Eckert proposes to assess the work of these critics by comparing their methods with those formulated by Levi-Strauss and then to define the achievements and the promise of auteur-structuralism and of structuralism in general.

The first influential work in English cine-structuralism was Nowell-Smith's *Luchino Visconti* (1967).<sup>4</sup> The purpose of criticism, according to it, is to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment in a director's work a structural hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The drawbacks to this approach, noted by Nowell-Smith, were the possibility of variable structures due to changes in an author's work over time and the temptation to neglect the myriad aspects of a film's production and aesthetic effect that a study of motifs does not impinge upon. Indeed in his own study, Nowell-Smith does not find a simple and comprehensive Visconti structure because the latter developed over the years and adopted many styles of film-making. His book also studies many aspects of production, history, and stylistic influence that have no bearing upon structure. Nevertheless, Eckert's dominant impression of the book is that structural themes are indeed at the core of Visconti's enterprise and of Nowell-Smith's critical interest.

Wollen's *Signs and Meaning* quotes Nowell-Smith's theory of criticism then takes up the films of Howard Hawks as a test case for the structural approach. He dichotomizes Hawks's

films into two categories, the adventure drama and the crazy comedy. These types express inverse views of the world, the positive and negative poles of the Hawksian vision. Wollen cautions that an awareness of differences and oppositions must be cultivated along with the awareness of resemblances and repetitions usually found in thematic or motif-seeking criticism. He then cites the main sets of antinomies in Hawks's work and notes how they break down into lesser sets, any of which may overlap or be foregrounded in different movies. But Wollen's "most intensive criticism" is saved for John Ford, in whose work he finds the master antinomy of wilderness and garden (terms derived from Henry Nash Smith). His analysis of Ford reaches its principal conclusion in this statement: "Ford's work is much richer than that of Hawks and . . . this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted auteur." For Eckert, this statement captures the essence of Wollen's species of structuralism, just as the search for a hard core of basic and recondite motifs defines Nowell-Smith's.

Both definitions were harmonious with the intentions of Jim Kitses's *Horizons West*.<sup>5</sup> To him, the auteur theory meant the idea of personal authorship in cinema and the concomitant critical responsibility to systematically examine all of a director's work, in order to trace characteristic themes, structures, and formal qualities. Kitses also takes from Henry Nash Smith the insight that the image of the West has a dialectical form. Central to the form of the Western is a philosophical dialectic, an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre. Kitses lists the principal antinomies involved and notes that polar terms may be transposed in the course of an auteur's development. (These three books led to articles by other English critics, some favorable to structuralism [Alan Lovell and Ben Brewster], some unfavorable [Robin Wood].)

Following his review of these texts, Eckert does not proceed immediately to the promised

evaluation of the auteur-structuralists. Instead he returns to Levi-Strauss, nominally to derive the principles with which to conduct this assessment. "I will take up the most provocative of Levi-Strauss's insights in the general order of their importance and breadth of application." The oddity of this long section is that Eckert uses only two of the many points it develops in his subsequent return to the auteur-structuralists. These are: that every myth is only a limited application of the pattern that emerges as the analysis of a body of myths proceeds, hence many myths must be analyzed before a valid structure can be discerned; and that figures in myths have meanings only in relation to other figures in that myth, they cannot be assigned set meanings.

Nowell-Smith makes a careful analysis of relationships in individual films and is especially attentive to the shifting nature of these relationships and to dialectical progressions, but his initial premise is that Visconti developed too much as an artist to make a comparative study of his films possible. Hence he considers each film singly, attempting to bring out its relationship, hidden or overt, to the rest of Visconti's work. The absence of a thoroughly comparative method not only qualifies Nowell-Smith's structuralism, it raises the issue whether or not the body of films produced by a director can qualify as a set of myths. Kitses does analyze a director's work as a single body of myth, but his individual figures are defined in archetypal and iconic terms; their meanings are traditional rather than dependent upon relationships within each film. Only his emphasis on the dynamic interaction of the figures and their tendency to form antinomic pairs resembles Levi-Strauss's analysis. (Lovell's method is very close to Kitses's, employing a mixture of archetypal and structural insights.) Peter Wollen shows the closest familiarity with Levi-Strauss's writings. His analysis of Hawks and Ford, though only intended to be exploratory and suggestive, (1) is less attuned to archetypes and is thoroughly directed at bundles of relations, and (2) is founded on the premise that it is only the analysis of the whole corpus which permits the

moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the individual film.

Eckert enlarges upon the two principles before concluding. Levi-Strauss's "The Structural Study of Myth" settled that meaning in mythology cannot be found in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of the myth, but only in the way those elements are combined. So much (Eckert adds) for father figures, traditional icons, and wilderness and garden. Accepting such set meanings may blind us to important shifts of relationship and commit us to the surface meaning of the myth. Traditional meanings may well emerge from the process of analysis, but the point is that they will be discovered rather than established *a priori*. The question of the degree of unity in an auteur's work is less easily resolved. The main premise implicit in the auteur theory is that a director's body of work possesses unity. The alternative notion, that an artist evolves through stages of thought and technique, is a nineteenth-century conception, attuned to purposive evolution. The modern study of myth has attacked evolutionary schemes in favor of synchronic studies of motifs, types, and forms. We must use judgment in deciding to what degree a director conforms to unity and invites a mythic analysis; and we must anticipate that an apparent evolution in style and theme may only mask what is recurrent in a body of work. Eckert concludes overall that the structural method will probably be productive in proportion to the discretion and intelligence with which it is applied. Its promise, however, is undeniable. "There remains much to be done beyond what current auteur-structuralism has suggested."

Why does Eckert return to basic Levi-Strauss between his review and his evaluation of auteur-structuralism, when so much of what he develops seems non-operative in relation to that project? Why, in defending auteur-structuralism, does Eckert begin again from zero by asking whether "film can be equated with myths" and questioning "the suitability of a structural study of a director's body of work—or of films in general"? Either the auteur-structuralists have

covered this ground before or they haven't. If they have, then Eckert's reconsideration is either repetitious or it is a critique of their foundational work, apparently a covert critique as this section makes no reference to their texts. If they have not covered this ground, then Eckert's defense of the auteur-structuralists uncovers an absence vastly more important than the virtues he finds in their work—their failure to found their criticism theoretically, the absence of an auteur-structuralist epistemology. In activating these texts, Eckert has activated the scandal of their lack of foundation. Attempting to integrate them, they have come apart in his hands. The middle section of his article is then a kind of glue or bricolage which attempts to put them back together.

Eckert's text provides a cue, in the form of a speech against itself, which turns us back to the original texts. Neither Kitses nor Nowell-Smith discusses Levi-Strauss. Wollen does, to be sure, but in ways which avoid rather than confront the problem of founding the method he proposes. This avoidance is inscribed in the rhetoric of Wollen's second chapter, "The Auteur Theory." The latter begins with the historical origins of the auteur theory, then quotes Nowell-Smith and applies the structural method to Hawks. It is only then that it discusses foundations—in two paragraphs squeezed between Hawks and Ford, a foundational discourse in the form of a transition between main headings and delivered on the run.

Something further needs to be said about the theoretical basis of the kind of schematic exposition of Hawks's work which I have outlined. The "structural approach" which underlies it, the definition of a core of repeated motifs, has evident affinities with methods which have been developed for the study of folklore and mythology.

There is a danger, as Levi-Strauss has pointed out, that by simply noting and mapping resemblances, all the texts which are studied (whether Russian fairy-tales or American movies) will be reduced to one, abstract and impoverished.

This means of course that the test of a

structural analysis lies not in the orthodox canon of a director's work, where resemblances are clustered, but in films which at first sight may seem eccentricities.

The protagonists of fairy-tales or myths, as Levi-Strauss has pointed out, can be dissolved into bundles of differential elements, pairs of opposites . . . We can proceed with the same kind of operation in the study of films, though, as we shall see, we shall find them more complex than fairy-tales. It is instructive, for example, to consider three films of John Ford and compare their heroes . . .<sup>6</sup>

In the four passages quoted, Wollen's text proceeds from a notation of similarities to a tenuous equation to an achieved integration to a wholesale importation which moreover cautions itself to proceed carefully. Needless to say, each of these stages is unearned, including the first, a notation of affinities at the phenomenal level which asserts its own evidence. The apparent progress of the passage is a feat of rhetoric. The fundamental questions—whether films are like myths, whether modes of myth study are applicable to film study, and whether the auteur theory is compatible with Levi-Straussian structuralism—are avoided by Wollen, elided by a skillful rhetoric which seems to answer them.

There are some theoretical passages following the discussion of Ford but they do not return to the problem of foundations. Here Wollen discusses the "noise" of camera style and acting, arguing that films, like myths, exist independently of style. Hence, despite noise, "the film can usually be discerned," "film" here meaning auteur-structure. Pivoting on the sentence: "It is as though a film is a musical composition rather than a musical performance . . .", Wollen then launches into a dazzling essay on the distinction between composition and performance in music, painting, and theater as they developed over several centuries. Following this he concludes that the director is not simply in command of a performance of a pre-existing text, but himself a composer also. The incidents and episodes of the original screenplay or novel are

the agents which are introduced into the mind

(conscious or unconscious) of the auteur and react there with the motifs and themes characteristic of his work. The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which fuse with his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work. Thus the manifest process of performance, the treatment of a subject, conceals the latent production of a quite new text, the production of the director as an auteur.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter concludes with a reminder that the task begun by the original auteur critics is still far from completed.

Founding auteur-structuralism would mean beginning with structuralism and its foundations and moving from it to film study, specifically to the study of auteurs, deriving the principles of the latter study from structuralism. As has been seen, Wollen does not do this. Instead he begins with auteurism, establishes it as an ongoing activity, then turns to structuralism as another ongoing activity, and then discovers affinities and similarities between the two.

Let us look more closely at these "affinities" and at the text's "discovery" of them. We note first that at least four different senses of "the auteur theory" may be distinguished in Wollen: the French original, Nowell-Smith's transformation, Wollen's transformation (1969), Wollen's transformation (1972). Yet Wollen refuses to differentiate these senses, speaking at all times of "the auteur theory," as though it were one thing now and had always been one thing. Besides blurring the first two senses, Wollen himself redefines the auteur theory, even as he affirms its singularity of meaning. Most readers may be aware that Wollen is transforming the auteur theory, not merely expositing it; but they may not be aware of how this device affects his argument, precisely because the rhetoric which this collapse of multiple meanings permits is so persuasive. So we ask—why does Wollen's text deny that it is altering the auteur theory as originally developed? Why does it pass off its transformation as a "discovery" of what already exists? That is, *why does it deny its own work?* The collapse of multiple meanings takes place

in several stages. First, by presenting Nowell-Smith's definition of the auteur theory as a "summary" of it "as it is normally presented today,"<sup>8</sup> Wollen denies the latter's transformation of the auteur theory even as he imports it into his own discourse. Not long after this Wollen discovers affinities between the auteur theory and structuralism. Since it is obvious that Nowell-Smith's 1967 book was already influenced by Levi-Strauss and his followers, this "discovery" is less than fortuitous. Wollen has already imported a basic structuralism on the "auteur theory" side of his exposition. As the essay proceeds, he brings this structuralism more specifically into line with the Levi-Strauss original, though still under cover of expositing a singular and constant auteur theory. What Wollen's assertion of constancy entails, at this point, is not only that auteurism and structuralism are literally the same thing, but that *they have always been the same*. It is only this impossible contention which relieves Wollen from having to provide foundations for auteur-structuralism. If he admitted that he was transforming the auteur theory, specifically that he was seeking to merge the auteur theory with structuralism, then he would have had to found or justify his action theoretically.

Wollen says at one point:

There are other kinds of code which could be proposed [besides that of auteur-structure], and whether they are of any value or not will have to be settled by reference to the text, to the films in question.<sup>9</sup>

Several other passages put the emphasis on results. There is a way of reading Chapter Two which says: all questions of logic and foundation aside, auteur-structuralism is justified because it works—that is, because it produces (excellent, true) results when applied to films. This reading of Wollen's text is supported by its rhetorical organization. Auteurism is established by the Hawks discussion before Levi-Strauss and structuralism are introduced; then, after two paragraphs, it turns to an even longer discussion of Ford. (Auteur-structuralism is happier in the field than in the theoretical laboratory.) The organization of the chapter makes these critical

discussions carry the principal weight of its argument. To a considerable degree, they *are* its argument. Leaving aside the merits of Wollen's results, let us look at this argument itself. What can be said against the argument of good results? Marxist theory, philosophy, and semiology have operated singly and conjointly to dismantle the ideological, conceptual, and linguistic foundations of empiricism. Any system of interpretation *generates* its own results. Every system of interpretation will produce "results" which are in full accordance with its methods. Hence justification by results is circular. As Roland Barthes says in an early text,

One seeks, and naturally one finds . . . We must not complain about this—the demonstration of a coherence is always a fine critical spectacle—but is it not evident that, though the episodic content of the proof may be objective, the postulate that justifies looking for it is utterly systematic?<sup>10</sup>

Even more importantly, any system which simply produces results as a kind of spectacle, that is, without dismantling and questioning its own foundations, assumptions, problematic, and operations (the means by which it produces results), is necessarily and entirely ideological.

The explanation of Eckert's middle section, too long and wandering for the project proposed in the first section and concluded in the third section, is that it attempts to provide for auteur-structuralism those foundations which the latter does not provide for itself. In doing so, it answers a question which it does not ask, which it cannot ask without calling attention to the scandal of its absence in the work of the auteur-structuralists, thereby undermining their work and possibly itself also. What of Eckert's foundational attempt? In fact it is no more than a sketch, far from the systematic and thorough study that would have been needed to carry its project. Still, it is interesting in several respects. It is genuinely foundational in that it grounds itself in Levi-Strauss and attempts to move forward toward auteurism. It proceeds in this task only by constructing a highly fragile latticework of premises, inferences, evidences, and connections, many of which are questionable yet each

one of which is necessary to make the link which Eckert seeks.

Whether these codes [of physical objects and of qualities in films] are part of a careful, logical system can only be established through research. My own preliminary attempts at analysis suggest that they are—<sup>11</sup>

The most interesting aspect of the section is that it moves in a direction nearly opposite to that of auteur-structuralism, toward a criticism of the *many* codes of cinema (most of which Wollen dismisses as “noise,” “inaccessible to criticism”<sup>12</sup>) rather than the single code of auteur-structure, and toward an understanding of cinema as myth very different from that of auteur-structuralism:

The dioscuric union of film-makers and their audience produces a strange Janus of art—myths made by mythmakers that are only certified as true or untrue after they have been created. Perhaps the best index to authentically mythic films, then, is the yearly box-office ratings.<sup>13</sup>

This is very nearly the antithesis of auteur-structuralism. Having reached this point, how does Eckert rearrive at auteur-structuralism, as promised in the first section? He does so only by an authorial *coup de force*—through an abrupt discontinuation of the foundational discourse, which amounts to its abandonment if not its repeal, and an arbitrary jump back to the original discourse. All of which constitutes an extreme and uncharacteristic scriptural violence and the second major way in which Eckert’s text criticizes itself, effectively demonstrating the impossibility of arriving at auteurism through a Levi-Straussian discourse. Immediately following the “box-office” statement Eckert says, “Two more of Levi-Strauss’s stipulations deserve brief consideration,” whereupon he adduces the two principles discussed above, which have no connection with his foundational discourse nor with the point at which he arrived in considering the box-office, but which provide the occasion for a none-too-smooth return to the auteur-structuralists.

“The issue of how figures are to be interpreted takes us to the heart of the whole enterprise I

have characterized as auteur - structuralism.”<sup>14\*</sup>

We have let the auteur-structuralist texts speak for themselves and in speaking, through their gaps, omissions, rhetorical strategies, and contradictions, destroy themselves. We have seen not only that the auteur-structuralist texts have no theoretical foundations, but also that what is present in these texts, their specific traces, can only be understood in relation to this absence. That is, these texts as they exist constitute themselves as an ersatz built over and in relation to this absence, which nevertheless warps them from the inside. We have not asserted positively that auteurism and structuralism are incompatible, that they *can not* be combined. Nor do we intend to do so, for that would involve first constructing such a foundation as we have demanded and then destroying it, a useless operation. Nor do we suppose that we would do a better job at this than the auteur-structuralists. On the contrary. In relation to the practical problem of directing film critical energies, however, we will consider briefly the problems faced by anyone attempting to do this. This will also help explain the failure of the auteur-structuralists, for they are clearly not unintelligent. The

\*Eckert’s text criticizes itself only covertly and unconsciously. At this point we are reminded of Nowell-Smith’s book, which (as Eckert himself presents it) contains an explicit critique of structuralism even as it seeks to apply the method. Nowell-Smith’s text is demoted by Eckert for its failed structuralism; but when we move outside of the Wollen and Eckert problematic (based on commitment to auteur-structuralism and, in Eckert’s case, on the question of which auteur-structuralism most closely resembles Levi-Strauss’s method) and raise our own questions, we are not bound by Eckert’s evaluation (which is consistent with his premises). Then we are free to reconsider Nowell-Smith’s text and perhaps find it the most interesting of the three, in part for its explicit critique of structuralism, both theoretical and practical. To another problematic it is considerably less disappointing that Nowell-Smith found himself unable to exclude “many aspects of production, history, and stylistic influence that have no bearing upon structure”<sup>15</sup> in considering Visconti’s films.

difficulty lies in the contradictory project of auteur-structuralism itself, which exists in its purest form in Wollen: the attempt to merge auteurism with structuralism *without altering either in the process*. But, as Eckert's middle section indirectly reminds us, for Levi-Strauss myths have no origins, no centers, no subjects, and no authors. Bodies of films organized by auteur signature are obviously defined by their origin, which is a subject and an author as well as a definitive center. Wollen attempts to deny this or at least he considers it important when he says, in the 1972 edition of *Signs and Meaning*, that the auteur is not a conscious creator but an unconscious catalyst and even (revising his theory of "noise") that the auteur-structure is only one code among many which are discernible.

What the auteur theory argues is that any film, certainly a Hollywood film, is a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final "coherent" version. Like a dream, the film the spectator sees is, so to speak, the "film facade," the end-product of "secondary revision," which hides and masks the process which remains latent in the film "unconscious." Sometimes this "facade" is so worked over, so smoothed out, or else so clotted with disparate elements, that it is impossible to see beyond it, or rather to see anything in it except the characters, the dialogue, the plot, and so on. But in other cases, by a process of comparison with other films, it is possible to decipher, not a coherent message or worldview, but a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which auteur analysis disengages from the film.<sup>15</sup>

The structure is associated with a single director, an individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved. The film is not a communication, but an artifact which is un-

consciously structured in a certain way. Auteur analysis does not consist of re-tracing a film to its origins, to its creative source. It consists of tracing a structure (not a message) within the work, which can then post factum be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds.<sup>16</sup>

Wollen twists and turns and makes vocabulary concessions to recent theoretical work, but he does not escape the criticisms he is aware of because he retains the subject as producer of unique or distinctive meaning. In the passage above, Wollen confuses a methodological point with a foundational one. Since auteur-structuralism works empirically (from the works to the director, rather than a priori, from the director to the works) and since it is not interested in the person of the director (his condition as actual subject—biography, psychoanalysis, personal ideology) but only with the structures which are labelled with his name, Wollen supposes that he has solved the foundational problems of auteur-structuralism outlined above. But he has not. To do so, he would have to explain how it can be that individual subjects produce unique or distinctive meanings (structures), which moreover have the integrity and constancy of mythic meanings and can be studied in the same way. In short, he would have to provide that theory of the subject which Levi-Strauss deliberately and systematically omits, because his work is founded upon the interchangeability of subjects in the production of meaning. The contention that (some) individual directors can and do stamp their films with a distinctive or unique meaning (structure) cannot be grounded in Levi-Strauss. Nor is the problem overcome if it is stipulated that the auteur-structure is only one meaning among many, for the problem of accounting for the production of this meaning remains.

Wollen is, in any case, ambiguous about his opening out to other codes and the implications of this opening for his method. The greatest source of ambiguity is that the 1972 edition of *Signs and Meaning* reprints chapters 1-3 *without change* but adds a new conclusion which seems to reconsider several issues, yet explicitly re-



tracts nothing bearing on auteur-structuralism, neither critical discussions nor theoretical formulations. Wollen continues to speak of "the auteur theory," even though he makes a few changes of emphasis. Now the director's structuring activity is unconscious whereas before it was "conscious or unconscious." Before it was the script or novel which acted as catalyst to the director, now it is the director who acts as catalyst to his materials. As noted, however, Wollen retains auteur-structure, nominally as one code among many, but really in a privileged position as he continues to identify structure with auteur-meaning and therefore meaning with auteur-structure. Above all, there is nothing in the 1972 edition which recants or revises the fundamentals of auteur-structuralism or overcomes the latter's foundational lack — its disconnection with Levi-Strauss. The latter's name is not mentioned in the new chapter. Wollen wishes to retain his critical achievements and his critical method, though he is willing to change his vocabulary to facilitate this. Hence the long reaffirmation of the auteur theory (pp. 167-173), which is not at all retracted in his remark that chapters 1 and 3 (not 2) are "the most valuable sections" and his remark that "I do not believe that development of auteur analyses of Hollywood films is any longer a first priority." This does not mean abandonment of his previous auteur studies, indeed it freezes them in the eternity of a completed auteurism. As he says in the next sentence, "This does not mean that the real advances of auteur criticism should not be defended and safeguarded."

The questions Can modes of myth study be applied to film study? and Can structuralism be merged with auteurism? are *not identical*. Both Wollen and Eckert assume this identity, though Eckert strains against the assumption and his text cracks on it. Auteur-structuralism treats the two questions as one; specifically, it reduces the first question to the second. It thereby makes the study of films as myths dependent upon the fusion of auteurism and structuralism and effectively rules out other modes of study. In this way it seeks to take over and occupy this field of study entirely. In English-language studies

so far, it has actually done so; the auteur-structuralists have succeeded in identifying their methods and concerns with the very notion of a study of films as myths. Having critiqued auteur-structuralism, we are in a position to reconsider this relationship and to disentangle these questions. When auteur-structuralism is destroyed, it is by no means the case that the study of films as myths is destroyed also. Indeed, it would seem that *only* the destruction of auteur-structuralism *liberates* the other question, that is, allows it to be asked and answered.\* Since prospects for the merger of auteurism and structuralism are not promising, it seems that film criticism would do better to look for other possibilities. Eckert's aberrant middle section suggests a non-auteurist structuralism, one neither dependent upon auteurist epistemology nor organizing its materials by auteur signature. It also suggests, apparently reinstating Metz, Eco, *et al.*, semiological study of cinematic codes of expression.

But before embarking on such studies, we should consider certain important criticisms of structuralism, which also apply to some practices of semiology. These criticisms derive from the wide-ranging theoretical developments inscribed in the texts of Derrida, Kristeva, Lacan, and many others. These criticisms have shaken structuralism to its foundations, or rather, shaken it *at* its foundations (and therefore everywhere) for it is a specifically foundational and epistemological critique. If course the texts concerned are far from complete agreement with each other, even in regard to the defects of structuralism. This polyphony, which includes repetition as well as discord, relieves the present text from the need to speak for or from any other particular text, which would in any case be foolhardy. Its list of criticisms of struc-

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\*The problematic of a text is not only the questions which it asks, but the questions which it does not ask. Specifically it is the relationship between these, for a text raises certain questions only at the price of not asking others. The relationship between questions asked and questions suppressed is always ideological.

turalism will therefore be partial, sketchy, and highly general.\*

The foundational defects of structuralism are interrelated. First of all, it is an empiricism. It takes for its object the text as given. This given, the textual object, is its horizon and absolute. Secondly, structuralism posits the object as other. It is based upon the separation of subject and object, that is, upon empiricist epistemology, which in turn is based upon traditional Western (dualist) metaphysics. This epistemology determines the practice of structuralism as a species of representation, itself locatable as concept and method within the historical ideologies of the West. (Michel Foucault identifies representation as the episteme of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>17</sup>) The structuralist work represents or reproduces the structure of the object; so that the two are related to each other as mirror-images. The structuralist text is a simulacrum of its object. (See Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity."<sup>18</sup>)

The critique of structuralism transforms this model in every respect. On the one hand, the text is no longer seen as an object, given and achieved (essentially a product), but as a process, as itself a production, specifically as a collocation of mechanisms for the production of meaning. Thus it is necessary to speak of the *work* of the text if one is to avoid reifying it à la the consumerist ideology of capitalism. This

collocation of mechanisms for producing meaning is itself not a given but is determined by material conditions which must be examined in analyzing the text. Thus the text cannot be understood by examination of the text alone. Similarly, indeed identically, the discourse which studies the text is productive. It does not represent the structure of the text, it does not study an object over a gap that divides subject from object, knower from known. It mixes with the text studied. The productivity of the text studied and that of the discourse which studies merge and interact to form a new text.

Related to the productivity of the text is the principle of intertextuality. This means, oversimply, that no text is isolated, discrete, unique, and that none is self-originating. Every text is a combination of other texts and discourses, which it "knots" in a certain way and from a certain ideological position. (Thus the notion of anthropology, of a universality of studies addressing culture as a whole, disappears. The latter denies its own signifying practice, which is always ideological.) Thus description of the structure of a text impoverishes and distorts it and, indeed, mistakes the nature of textuality itself.

Empiricism is overthrown not only because the productivity of the text replaces the static object, intertextuality replaces structure, and the conjoined productivity of critical practice replaces the subject-object split and representation, but also because inquiry is no longer limited to the object itself, the given, but addresses what is there in light of what is not there. This includes questioning the problematic of the text: not just the answers the text gives, but the questions it asks, and not just the questions it asks, but the questions which it does not ask. Why are certain discourses included in the text and others left out? Why does the text combine these and accent them in a certain way? By subordinating itself to the object and its problematic, empiricism is necessarily ideological in function. It reproduces the ideology of the object and above all its own ideology, by constituting itself as a discourse which does not ask fundamental and foundational questions, above

\*Of course, "structuralism" refers to a great number of discourses and to a great number of texts combining these discourses in various ways. It is perhaps too early to say that structuralism has been definitively replaced by a subsequent movement, let alone to differentiate the structuralist from the non-structuralist constituents of the new constellation. The critique of structuralism outlined here may even be read as structuralism's critique of itself. The critique is then a purge of the empiricist wing of structuralism and of the empiricist elements which have figured in it more generally. In such a critique-purge, "structuralism"—constituted as a sum of defects, as that which is critiqued—becomes the virtual object of structuralism, the theoretical activity, in the latter's clarification and transformation of itself. Such an object need not have hard edges, still less need it correspond to actual objects. What is important is the theoretical activity which it permits.

all of itself.

The relation of this theoretical work to film study may not be immediately apparent, except for the immense shadow it throws on the entire project of cine-structuralism, by which we mean here not only auteur-structuralism but other kinds as well. There exists in English, however, a film-critical text which seeks to build itself upon this theoretical foundation, the *Cahiers* collective text, "*Young Mr. Lincoln*." As mentioned above, the entirety of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" may be read as a critique of structuralism and as a realization of the theoretical critique of structuralism in the area of film criticism.

#### NOTES

This text owes much to conversations and collaborations with Daniel Dayan over the past year.

1. *Film Comment*, 9, No. 3 (May/June, 1973), pp. 46-51; *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1972); *Screen*, 13, No. 3, (Autumn, 1972), pp. 5-47.

2. *Theorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 75.

3. This text very nearly reverses Eckert's findings, concluding that (3) is not promising, at least as pursued so far. For reasons not fully developed here, we find (1)—perhaps more along the lines of Oudart than of Metz—and (2) of considerable promise. See Alan Williams's piece in this issue for a study of narrative mechanisms in *La Ronde*. Such study does not reduce the text to "underlying structures." It works on the traces of the film, it does not bypass the inscription in favor of systems which allegedly underlie it. It not only works on the signifiers, whereas auteur-structuralism bypasses the signifiers to get to the signifieds; it studies the *production* of signifiers, specifically those mechanisms which generate narrative. If this is not comprehensive study of inscription, as in the *Cahiers* "*Young Mr. Lincoln*," it is necessary preparation for such study.

4. *Luchino Visconti* (1967; New York, Doubleday and Co., 1968).

5. *Horizons West* (1969; Indiana University Press, 1970).

6. *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 93-94.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

8. Note the crucial repetition of the word "indispensable," before and after the Nowell-Smith quote, on p. 80. Two things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

9. *Signs and Meaning*, p. 168. Wollen's ambiguous use of the word code confuses his text at several points. Many of these confusions are carried over into Eckert's

text where they generate new ones. One can argue that codes function at the level of meaning analyzed by Levi-Strauss, but these must be differentiated from the other codes referred to by Wollen. Levi-Strauss isolates what Hjelmslev would call the form of content. It is perhaps preferable to refer to structure at this level and to reserve "code" for the levels of expression. Thus structuralism, concerned with form of content, indeed—positing many layers of content—with a deep structure within the form of content, may be distinguished from semiology, which is concerned with moving from the level of expression to the level of content via codes. But, as noted in the text, structuralism is often used globally to refer to all work influenced by Levi-Strauss and structural linguistics.

Wollen consistently confuses codes of expression with form of content, according them an equal status, perhaps in an attempt to make his "structures" seem more legitimate. Asking whether particular codes are of value or not compounds the confusion. It is evident that all codes have value in the production of meaning in film. The question can only embody a preference for certain types of meaning and methods of analysis over others. The answer depends on the principle of pertinence chosen and the results desired by the analyst.

10. *On Racine* (1960; New York, Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 170.

11. "The English Cine-Structuralists," p. 49. Again, a confusion regarding codes. To the extent that a film produces meaning at all, one must assume the operation of codes at the level of expression. Codes are by definition logical in that they are constructed by a logical system of analysis.

12. *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 104-105. "Noise" for Wollen has quite a different meaning than for most semiologists. He seems to consider as noise anything deriving from the level of expression. If camera style and acting were the noise which Wollen suggests, that is, if they resisted codification, then no form of content could emerge from film at all. Hjelmslev would argue that one must posit a total parallel (not identity) between expression and form for the process of signification in cinema to be conceivable at all. Wollen revises his theory of noise in the 1972 edition, but, as argued in the text, with considerable ambiguity regarding the question of codes.

13. "The English Cine-Structuralists," p. 50.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

16. *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 167-168.

17. *The Order of Things* (1966; London, Tavistock, 1970), pp. 46-217.

18. *Collected Essays* (1964; Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 213-220.